

Nikolay Frederik Severin Grundtvig

# **The School for Life**

*and the Academy in Sorø*

1838



[N F S Grundtvig, 1783–1872](#)

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*Plus:*

V. I. Lenin

## **Speech to an All-Russia Conference of Political Education Workers**

*3 November 1920*

## The School for Life and the Academy in Sorø (1838)

### *Excerpt #1*

Although this opposition has as little to do with the spirit of Christianity as the conclusions that were drawn from it, nonetheless Christianity's letter and shadow have undeniably served to sanctify both. After the school had laid us in the grave, or at least deformed our healthy human nature and eroded our vitality, our forefathers apparently consoled themselves with the thought that it was only the body that was being killed, only our completely depraved human nature that was being maltreated. As long as we had learned our scripture and catechism as well as the next man, we had obtained a title-deed to eternal life. As for temporal death, far from separating us from it, it was precisely the only road and desirable bridge towards that eternal life. I realise that this superstition with a Christian appearance is a long way from either oppressing or comforting many people in our time. But what our forefathers ascribed in particular to the sort of Christianity that can be learned from books and forced into children is now generally ascribed to all manner of book-knowledge and mechanical reflection! These are supposed to be an everlasting gain for the soul, however useless or even damaging they may appear on earth to both body and soul and to all the skilfulness towards which the life of man is predisposed, as well as to all the industriousness upon which our earthly welfare, cheerfulness, and common sense evidently rest through the will of Providence and the nature of our being.

Wherever this unnatural partiality for death prevails, it does not seem very helpful to defend life in black and white or to enumerate the deadly sins of the school. Yet there are those of us who either by natural strength or particularly favourable circumstances retain enough human vitality to survive the sickness. We can see how the school works towards the destruction of the final remains of our glorious human nature, until all civilised nations inevitably become slaves of their animal nature and of the barbarism around them. We cannot therefore do other than testify, exhort, and warn, first by speech and example as far as they go, and then by the pen - if for no other reason than to prove how dead and powerless are those written letters of the alphabet for which people sacrifice the lives of their children and from which they expect eternal fruits.

The situation is not quite so desperate as it appears, and least of all in Denmark, where the so-called 'educated circles' are in fact more natural at heart than they appear or dare admit themselves to be. In Denmark it would be a rare event if

someone really wished himself or his children to die as a result of education and literary skill! So at least among us speech and writing will gain sufficient acceptance and, so to speak, 'general applause' - to Death's chagrin and in the interests of life - as soon as one understands their purpose. The fact that this is very difficult must not surprise us, since precisely because we are correct in our allegation of the demoralizing influence of the dead school system, we who speak and write and they who listen and read cannot help but suffer from a great lack of vitality and from making a mess of our own mother-tongue.

The feeling that we are in urgent need of a School for Life - as we have also recently learned from the vociferous people's voice in Roskilde and Viborg - must by now be fairly widespread in Denmark. So when nevertheless more Schools for Death are requested, it is a clear and simple error that can easily be explained. It is partly due to the lack of that clear-sighted eye for life which is pre-conditioned in the lack of schools for life, and partly due to the gullibility of the Danes, who will invariably and until further notice accept it as an article of faith when - quite unlike the Grammar School, which openly professes a pact with death - a school boldly pretends to be 'the narrow road that leads to life'. So the more we teach ourselves to speak and write naturally, clearly, plainly, and cheerfully about this 'matter of life and death', the more the living Danish education that we so wish to replace the dead Latin one will be understood and cherished. What makes the case look desperate is partly the genteel ambition of most Latinists, both young and old, great and small, and partly the natural weakness of the Danes where logic is concerned. For genteel ambition resents the thought that a school education may not have been a giant stride forward to enlightenment but actually a step backward from life. The Danes' weakness in logic - despite their strong objections and their everyday experience - easily dupes them into believing that either in grammar or in mathematics there is a panacea that will cure everything in the course of time even if its mode of operation is unintelligible to ourselves. Apparently it is also absolute folly to believe that human nature, the life of a nation, and its mother-tongue would be able to win their case in a court thus constituted. But appearances deceive, and nowhere more so than Denmark, where there is now sorrow, now joy. So, just as we have found many good things under the appearance of the opposite, we shall also similarly find powerful spokesmen for nature, life, and the mother-tongue, even if all the spokesmen are wearing women's clothes!

Indeed, on that we can and must depend! Mother Denmark and her daughters will soon learn how to understand us, even though we chatter away in a somewhat stilted and obscure manner about life and the definite advantages of resolute and vigorous industriousness, and of the mother-tongue in all circumstances and in particular for 'everyday use', rather than about mathematics and grammar, algebra, lettering, and all sorts of scholasticism. As soon as we in Denmark have won *woman*

to our cause, we have won the kingdom's immortal queen, since the king will never for long have the heart to refuse her anything. Indeed, it is at that point that we have won Denmark's heart, which the head can never bear to crush. This outcome, with its own deep, natural reasons, will be found to hold good more or less everywhere, and in Denmark is so completely and radically the case as scarcely anywhere else. In our country, when nobody else knows how a man is to be made to see reason, his wife is sure to know.

And among us there is hardly an old headmaster, much less a young teacher, whom pretty girls could not easily teach how to raise his mother-tongue far above all dead languages. Once women in Denmark realise that under the old system their language and all the enlightenment and education they can achieve, without learning either mathematics or Latin grammar, is called coarseness and barbarism, the old system will lapse of its own accord.

I see this with my own eyes every time, despite my express prohibition and my moving description of all the misery that will most likely follow, my wife clears up my study, cleans the windows, and compels me firmly to kiss her for it! Meanwhile I scratch behind my ears and cannot deny that the room has become lighter and more attractive, and that the little things that may have been mislaid are much easier to find than before, when everything was hidden in half-light under the dust and piles of paper. This is definitely what will happen to the inner study in the Danish man's head, once the Danish woman has the courage to clear up and clean the windows there.

But is it not a treasonable offence to teach the members of this beautiful and kind sex - who are captivating and highly ingenious at handling men, yet nonetheless completely un-lettered and un-mathematical, unscientific, and therefore inherently spiritless, unreasoning, and barbaric - is it not treason to teach them to know their own powers, or at least use them in the field of education, which they have so far modestly left in the hands of men? Is it not simply a blind physical power, and therefore precisely the strongest, most dangerous, and most terrible power we can ally ourselves with in order to topple what we call a tyranny - especially since we do not have the least guarantee that it will not, in its blind activity, turn bad to worse and cast us headlong back into barbarism?

If the fair sex we are talking about were not Mother Denmark and her true daughters, or if I were not something of an historian and a Nordic poet, I really do not know how I would answer. But now the matter speaks for itself. For like all Denmark's serious poets, I must thank Mother Denmark and her daughters for the fact that we did not have to emigrate like the North Americans to find readers. And as an historian I would claim that it was not those members of the fair sex who

abused their superiority to the detriment of spirit and life who wished to ally themselves with me, not the friend of naturalness and the mother-tongue and useful industriousness. It was exactly the opposite that was the case, while Mother Denmark gave birth to, and her daughters garlanded, not only the heroes who defended the kingdom against all barbarians but also the poets who in every land are the natural priests of the national spirit as well as the saga-tellers who penned striking records of the deeds of the heroes. Finally I must add that it is not for lack of solid arguments against the school that fights with nature, the life of the people, and the mother-tongue that I feel the need for assistance from the fair sex. It is only because the irrational preference for the unnatural, for bookwormery, and for dead languages defies all argument and can only be defeated by another and stronger natural love which sets life high above books and which is at one with the mother-tongue. It is only in order to validate this, to underline my alliance with Mother Denmark and her daughters, and to demonstrate its innocence and the benefits that its promise of victory must entail - and not our of any confidence in the effect of rational argument at present - that I shall endeavour to demonstrate the necessity of a People's High School for the people. Far from spiritually outlawing Mother Denmark and wounding her deepest feelings, this exposition will appeal both to her head and to her heart.

Let me first attempt to state as clearly as possible what I understand by the School for Life, since I have noticed that the majority have rather vague or even quite wrong ideas about such an institution. At the moment it exists only as an idea on paper, unfortunately. The result is that it is always believed to be a literary laboratory where the rules are decreed and inculcated, according to which one must correct, improve, and in fact, remake life completely. The beginning of this process is, of course, a disintegration - that is to say, a death. This typically German fancy - that life must be explained before it is lived transformed, according to the learned heads - can only mean all the schools it establishes into workshops of death and decomposition, where the worms live well at the expense of life. This fancy I completely reject. I maintain that if the school really is to be an educational institution for the benefit of life, it must first make neither education nor itself its goal. The primary goal must be what serves the interests of life. Secondly, it must take life as it really is and strive only to illuminate it and promote what makes it serviceable. No school can create a new life in us. It must therefore neither destroy the old one nor waste time developing rules that a different and better life would supposedly follow, if we ever possessed it.

Since human life in all its complexity may nevertheless be classified into three main branches - the religious, the social, and the academic - one could correspondingly imagine three sorts of Schools for Life: the Church School, the People's High School, and the University. These must of course have the same diversity as their

corresponding life in society. But since they said at Roskilde and Viborg that only the People's School was missing, this is the one I shall dwell on here - so much the more since it is the only one common to us all. We can and must all become educated and useful citizens, Danish citizens, but obviously only a few at a time can become professors and scholars. And as long as we do not delude ourselves that the Church School can create a religious and Christian life where it does not exist, we must conclude that we have enough church schools just as we have enough churches, for wherever life does not exist, its enlightenment is completely superfluous. Finally we have too many institutions rather than too few, too large rather than too small, in which to educate our clergy and our professors, whereas we have none at all in which to educate Danish citizens. So even if all our educational institutions were admirable and appropriate they would be quite inadequate so long as we lacked a high school for the national social life in which we must all participate and regard as the natural root and source of all endeavour. If our social life is spurned and neglected, all other education must itself be as dead as it is deadening for our people and damaging for the kingdom.

I am well aware that this way of thinking is a great heresy among the academics since the Latinists have to maintain that to become a good Latinist one must above all be on guard against Danish and all Danicisms. One must constantly get away from Danish barbarism to 'classical soil', if one is to be at home among the ancients. At the same time the mathematicians preach a pure scientific spirit that is really concerned with neither life nor death, nor indeed any sort of human activity. In itself this spirit is so universal and cosmopolitan in its application that it cannot possibly limit itself to any particular language, or give special preference to the needs and interests of any individual nation or kingdom, unless it is precisely there that both pure and applied mathematics is given most study and widest scope. Without retracting my own 'academic' heresy - which lies roughly equidistant from both of these 'confessions' and proclaims the whole great life of man, of our race, not excluding but embracing the life of the nations and the individual as the object and task of the true, living spirit of learning - I nevertheless wish here sedulously to avoid all learned controversy, only from my own position as a common citizen do I observe that the country and the people are very badly served by 'erudite' men on their guard against their mother-tongue, and not much better served by those who want everything to be added up into measures and numbers. So they would do all countries a great service if they founded a 'Learned Republic' in New South Wales, or wherever else there is room, and either made Latin their mother-tongue there or created a universal language in which they informed the world, by the first ship available, of their discoveries, be it in Latin grammar or pure mathematics or somewhere in between. They would doubtless have been given this advice a long while ago if people had not held the conviction that the dead languages, and particularly Latin grammar, were not only the source of all profound knowledge but

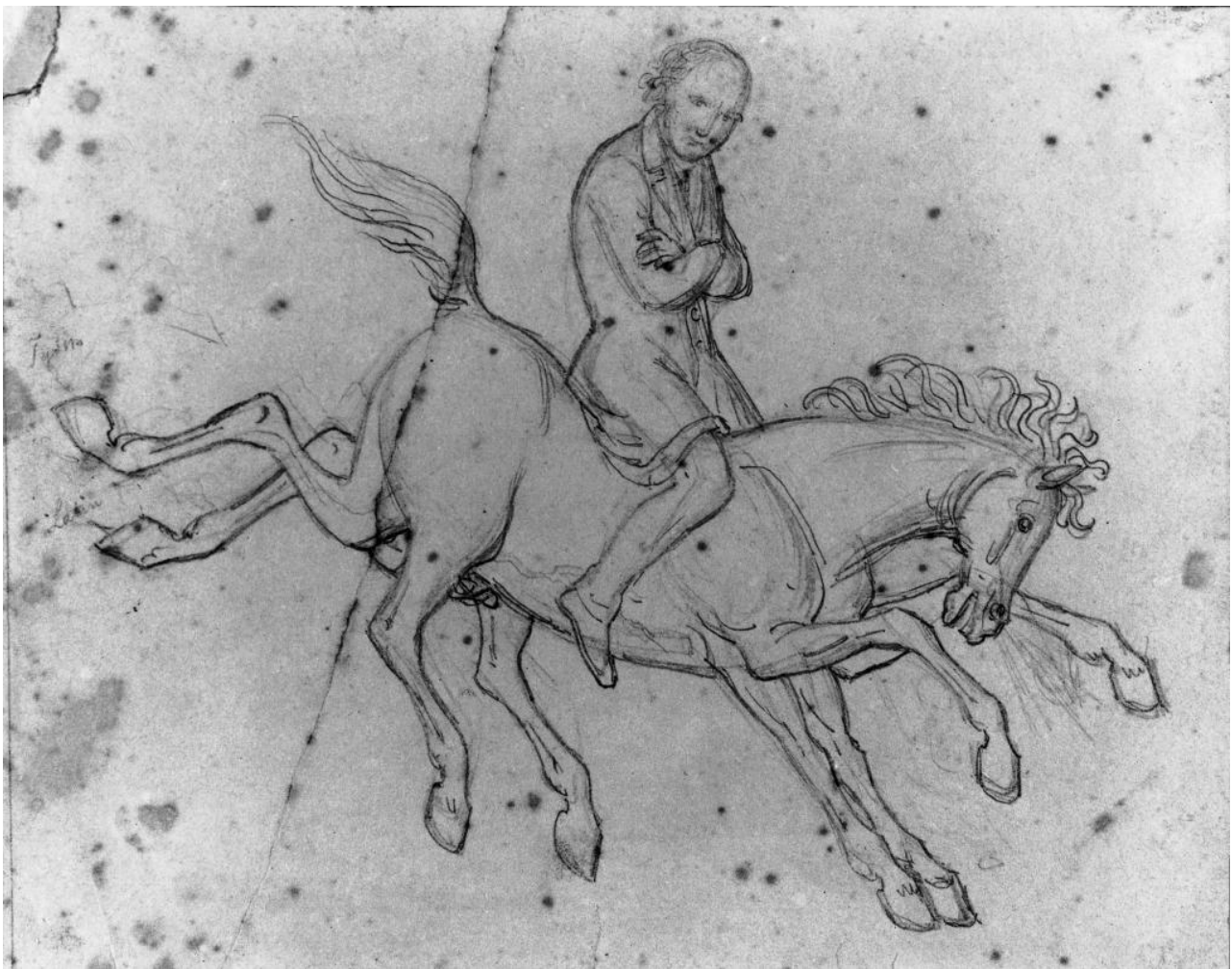
also of the education that was desired for all state civil servants and required for the clergy, judges, and the like. People even believe that mathematics can now perform miracles to improve and ennoble all *social* pursuits, while simultaneously sharpening the intellect to explain virtually everything!

To make this as short and as clear as possible, I accept for what it is worth that the Danish clergy, judges, and so on, in order to become competent civil servants in their field, have to plough through Latin grammar in their childhood and write innumerable Latin essays. Later at university, in addition to text books in mathematics, astronomy, physics, and practical and speculative philosophy, they still have to be taught, in the case of the clergy, to translate and explain the New Testament in Latin, and, in the case of the judges, to apply Roman Law to Danish conditions and translate and understand Danish Law in Latin. I allow all this to speak for itself, because the good cause will gain nothing from using my pen to attack so deeply-rooted a prejudice. But I confess that it is my firm conviction that all boyish pseudo-learning is a pestilence, and that bookwormery, segregation from the people, disregard of the mother-tongue, and an idolisation of Latin literature -which is inimical to all nations and kings and consists of eulogies over tyranny and rebellion - are the most inappropriate childhood learning for Royal Danish civil servants that I can imagine!

Suppose, however, that I was utterly mistaken in thinking this way. Suppose that I myself had to thank Latin grammar and exercises, reading classics, and doing Latin exegesis of the New Testament for being able to become the sound Danish priest and patriot I fancy myself to be. Even if this were true, it is not through Latin grammar and essays and going to Grammar School that we come to love Denmark or become familiar with the people and its mother-tongue. So here at least one gap exists in our system for educating Danish civil servants to have an active influence on the life of Danish society and its people - as clergy and jurists must. This gap cannot be filled by anything less than a high school for Danish national and social life, where the Mother-tongue is sovereign and everything has to do with the King, the People, and the Fatherland. Furthermore, even if one were to claim that a close acquaintance with Latin (a language completely alien to Danish) and a general knowledge of Rome (the tyrannical enemy of kings and nations) were the best preparation for a partiality for, and a familiarity with, all things Danish -because compressed opposites are best suited to illuminate each other (*opposita juxta posita magis illucescunt*) -it cannot be denied that it is a hazardous venture to stop halfway and merely trust to luck that a Danish culture will be the result, and that Latin will then be seen in its proper, hateful, and abhorrent light.

For unless this change occurs, we shall become more unsuitable as Royal Danish civil servants the more we learn to write and speak Latin, and the more completely

we have grasped and assimilated the Roman outlook, thought-mode, and speech pattern. These are not just totally alien to the Danes' nature, mother-tongue, and circumstances, they are actually inimical to them. I myself have spent at least thirty years getting Rome and Latin out of my system to the extent that can now be seen and heard. And in many respects this can only be called a modest success, even though I have really had nothing else to do and yet have seldom been idle. So if it should be found appropriate in future to let the Royal Danish civil servants take this dangerous Appian or Latin detour to the Danishness they least of all can do without, then the homeward journey from classical soil and the conversion from the Roman thought-mode and the Latin style must be made easier for them in every possible way.



Grundtvig on [Sleipnir](#)



## Excerpt #2

For, as a people who know their history, we realise that the enemy is more dangerous the less we know him. And we give a hearty laugh at the blind hatred which refuses to learn from its enemies, despite that being the only benefit and pleasure one may have of them. So the question is simply that just as our peasant farmers are undeniably best served by sticking to Saxo in Danish, so will the Northerner only gain any advantage from Latin when no one slaves for it, but only a few at a time master it and force it to slave for us.

I cannot embark here upon the organisation of the Danish High School, since, as with all things human, we must be born first before we can know which bonnet suits our head. Least of all can we know how tall we shall be, or what Time will teach us. So I would really not have mentioned it, had we not become so used to it in the Schools for Death that we can barely imagine a school whose entire path is not laid down from the outset. That of course is easily done with 'the art of letters', which consists of learning a certain number of words and rules by heart and at best scrutinizing and copying such fixed and stone-dead things as books! There is no possibility there of drawing on the *development* of life, which allows for no stagnation and cannot follow other rules than natural laws, or of drawing on the *enlightenment* of life, which must be tempered by life as it really is. We can therefore honestly say that in a People's Civic High School for our day, and our children's day, there ought to be an opportunity to learn Foreign Languages, Mathematics, History, and all that the individual wishes for, and has the time to apply himself to either for its usefulness or its enjoyment. With a Royal Danish High School in Sorø this would more or less come of its own accord.

But the main issue - what is living, what is common to all, what is universal, which must be the soul and purpose of such a high school: the appropriate development and enlightenment of the people's character in the mother-tongue to the benefit of the fatherland and the joy of the king - this main issue takes the form of a reciprocal teaching and living interaction. It is the leaders' task to promote this on every side to their undying honour, according to the given circumstances. It will already be a great endeavour to describe this historically, so to work out mathematically or prescribe schematically this manifestation of life, this development of light, this conduction of heat is simply impossible. Poetically, one can sense and assume a good part of it, if one has a brotherly share in the people's nature and the mother-tongue. But even if I dared to appropriate such a share for myself - and did not resemble a passably Danicised Friesian or an Anglo-Saxon rather than an ancient Dane - I would not find it appropriate here to describe my sweet dreams. This is partly because even the clearest use of imagery at the moment is obscure to most Danish readers and partly because it is of course always the *ideal* that one poetically describes. And from this a school, which is a living organism, is inevitably at its

beginning at least as far distant from this ideal as the span of its own future development. For it is clear that books and everything resembling them will play as small and inferior a role as possible at the People's High School, where the goal cannot possibly be 'exams and a livelihood' but must be education and enlightenment - which is a private matter for everyone and is its own reward - and a cultural development and education for life. We can gain the clearest idea about this if we ask what the members of the People's State Council require in order to fill their positions and be equal to their tasks. To this belongs undoubtedly a living idea of a civil society existing for the common good, a living feeling of the people's distinctive character, an inner affection for the king and fatherland, an ability in the mother-tongue to express oneself in words with life and lightness, freedom and propriety, and finally, a clear overview of what we have and what we lack, based on reliable information about the state of the country. Yet it is equally clear that books and bookishness will at first play a very disproportionate role, partly because even the best leaders that can be found have most of their knowledge and wisdom from books and have come to resemble them far too much, and partly because for centuries the school in general has diligently preserved a deep gulf between life and the light, so that life grew constantly murkier and the light more vapid. Thus, it will inevitably take time and effort on both sides to fulfil the school's purpose of building a golden bridge over the gulf, and when that succeeds it will be to its undying honour!

We should therefore never ask what the People's High Schools in general or the Royal Danish High School in particular can accomplish at this moment, or to what extent they will succeed. Both depend on thousands of incalculable circumstances and, as with all desperate sicknesses, the only possible life-saving appliance should be grasped, even though it may probably fail. For if we continue with a school system that constantly separates life and learning even more, constantly eats up more of our love for the fatherland, increasingly loosens all the living ties that link us to it and one another, kills and mangles the mother-tongue that is the only natural expression of our thoughts and feelings, and persistently develops and fosters a boyish self-conceit and self-will and all manner of vanity, tinsel love, and greed for 'assured livelihoods', then we are deliberately digging our own grave! Then the misfortune must soon be too great to be overcome, the deep gulf too broad for any bridge, and even too broad to be flown over by any bird or poet of the people in a suit of feathers. If the People's High School could simply stop the awful race to death and destruction - and according to the laws of human nature it must be *able* to do so everywhere - then our gain would already be immeasurably great. And where it worked least, it would nonetheless work much better by creating a competitive race, however feeble, for a people's life and civil happiness. I do not say this because I am in any doubt that especially in the North the People's High Schools will do wonders and that in the course of time the Royal Danish High

School in particular will have what perhaps not the world but what the Danes will call the best, most beneficial, and blessed effects. I say it because a distrust of our own judgement and powers and a consequent softness and admiration for all things foreign - which is the Danish national flaw - will weaken the High School's effectiveness for a time, just as it has delayed its establishment.

However, if only its establishment is not delayed until the favourable moment has passed, it will surely contribute to the High School's appropriate formation and future flowering if we expect very little or nothing from it at first and draw on it sparingly.

For the more assuredly will it then exceed all expectations from the outset, and the more easily will a proper freedom and a decent discretion consolidate themselves. With such an innovation this is of particular importance from the outset, when bungling and errors of judgement cannot be avoided.

Finally, a brief word about our usual bee in the bonnet here in Denmark that if the Greeks, without knowing any other language than their own, achieved not only a civil but also an academic education which our scholars admire to this day, then the Danes on the contrary, should be unable without any foreign languages, to achieve even the civic education which by the laws of nature are bound to merge with the mother tongue!

Without embarking on a philosophical study of the folly of such a claim I shall only say that after a fairly good acquaintance with Danish literature, right from Holberg's *Peder Paars* to Ingemann's *Holger Danske*, I do not hesitate for a moment to state that most of our students are far from having as good an education as they themselves, without knowing a word of either Greek or Latin, could have enjoyed simply by acquiring what has been written in Danish. I also allow the well-considered claim to follow that while of course a profession can make an acquaintance with one or several foreign languages necessary, or even useful for the individual, there are at any one time only very few people who thereby acquire a real education, only the very few, that is, who have the aptitude, desire, and opportunity to encompass academically the human life in its entirety, which far from excluding the people's life actually embraces it!

The fact of the matter is that nowhere in the so-called educated world do the learned people who quite naturally speak out on educational matters know so little of their mother-tongue and what is written in it as in Denmark. And no wonder, for by the time the children who are to cultivate the various disciplines are only 9 or 10 years old, they are normally regarded as so trained in the mother-tongue that they are now clever enough to learn who knows how many foreign languages. Indeed in their naivety they consider it poverty in the mother-tongue when the wretched, ignorant boys cannot find words in it to express their *foreign* wisdom! They arrive at

university with bits of two or three dead languages and a couple of living ones, especially learned through their grammar, without - as far as the school reigns - having 'wasted their time' on the works of a single Danish writer! Of course at university it is regarded as an excess that can have the most dangerous consequences if the student pursues what lies closest to the heart of us all, mankind and Danes alike. Instead they study for exam after exam where the questions are not about the mother-tongue and natural development but about what all manner of foreign books say, including some dreadful Danish books. When finally the academic course is completed and the graduate has it in writing that he possesses not only all the education he needs but also a good deal that he can mediate to others, all that he lacks is at the most a sweetheart to compensate for all the boredom of his learning and a livelihood as a reward for his long grind. And how many fewer will have the desire, the courage, and the strength to become small again in order to grow naturally, which they obviously must if they are ever to learn what the mother-tongue is fit for, or what is to be found in Danish books!

Far from exaggerating, I should like to add, God be praised: Things are not quite as bad as the Latin Grammar School aims to make them! A little Danish is smuggled in for quite a few of them, and I still remember with pleasure how as a 'Latin' schoolboy I read the ancient chronicles of Denmark of an evening in a shoemaker's workshop.

Such an experience is of course an exception, and as a Danish writer of thirty years standing, I have had more than enough opportunity to note and lament that the rule is unfortunately followed better than any other rule, even in the Latin Grammar Book. So however desperate it may seem to write in Denmark of the desirability of a Danish High School, nevertheless the need for an establishment for the cultivation of the mother-tongue and the discovery of what has been written in it is nowhere under the sun so great or so clear as sunlight as here in Denmark. And since evidently it is only the hope that such an establishment will be celebrated opportunely that has given both myself and every Danish writer with the least depth and seriousness the courage in such desperate circumstances to be so, why should I not hope, whatever the Latinists say, that it is now high time we at last succeeded!

## **Speech Delivered at an All-Russia Conference of Political Education Workers of Gubernia and Uyezd Education Departments; November 3, 1920<sup>[1]</sup>**

Comrades, allow me to speak on several ideas, some of which were dealt with by the Central Committee of the Communist Party and by the Council of People's Commissars in connection with the formation of the Chief Committee for Political Education, while others came to me in connection with the draft submitted to the Council of People's Commissars. This draft was adopted yesterday as a basis; its details have still to be discussed.

I shall permit myself only to say, for my part, that at first I was highly averse to any change in the name of your institution. In my opinion, the function of the People's Commissariat of Education is to help people learn and teach others. My Soviet experience has taught me to regard titles as childish jokes; after all, any title is a joke in its way. Another name has now been endorsed: the Chief Committee for Political Education.

As this matter has already been decided, you must take this as nothing more than a personal remark. If the matter is not limited merely to a change of label, it is only to be welcomed.

If we succeed in drawing new people into cultural and educational work, it will not be just a change of title, and then we can reconcile ourselves to the "Soviet" weakness of sticking a label on every new undertaking and every new institution. If we succeed, we shall have achieved something more than ever before.

The link between education and our policy should be the chief inducement in making people join us in our cultural and educational work. A title may express something if there is a need for it, for along the whole line of our educational work we have to abandon the old standpoint that education should be non-political; we cannot conduct educational work in isolation from politics.

That idea has always predominated in bourgeois society. The very term "apolitical" or "non-political" education is a piece of bourgeois hypocrisy, nothing but humbuggery practised on the masses, 99 per cent of whom are humiliated and degraded by the rule of the church, private property and the like. That, in fact, is the way the bourgeoisie, still in the saddle in all bourgeois countries, is deceiving the masses.

The greater the importance of a political apparatus in such countries, the less its independence of capital and its policy.

In all bourgeois states the connection between the political apparatus and education is very strong, although bourgeois society cannot frankly acknowledge it. Nevertheless, this society indoctrinates the masses through the church and the institution of private property.

It is one of our basic tasks to contrapose our own truth to bourgeois “truth”, and win its recognition.

The transition from bourgeois society to the policy of the proletariat is a very difficult one, all the more so for the bourgeoisie incessantly slandering us through its entire apparatus of propaganda and agitation. It bends every effort to play down an even more important mission of the dictatorship of the proletariat, its educational mission, which is particularly important in Russia, where the proletariat constitutes a minority of the population. Yet in Russia this mission must be given priority, for we must prepare the masses to build up socialism. The dictatorship of the proletariat would have been out of the question if, in the struggle against the bourgeoisie, the proletariat had not developed a keen class-consciousness, strict discipline and profound devotion, in other words, all the qualities required to assure the proletariat’s complete victory over its old enemy.

We do not hold the utopian view that the working masses are ready for a socialist society. From precise facts provided by the entire history of working-class socialism we know that this is not the case, and that preparedness for socialism is created only by large-scale industry, by the strike struggle and by political organisation. To win the victory and accomplish the socialist revolution, the proletariat must be capable of concerted action, of overthrowing the exploiters. We now see that it has acquired all the necessary qualities, and that it translated them into action when it won power.

Education workers, and the Communist Party as the vanguard in the struggle, should consider it their fundamental task to help enlighten and instruct the working masses, in order to cast off the old ways and habituated routine we have inherited from the old system, the private property habits the masses are thoroughly imbued with. This fundamental task of the entire socialist revolution should never be neglected during consideration of the particular problems that have demanded so much attention from the Party’s Central Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars. What kind of structure should the Chief Committee for Political Education have? How should it be linked up with other institutions? How should it be linked up, not only with the centre but with local bodies? These questions will be answered by comrades who are more competent in the matter, have already gained considerable experience, and have made a special study of the matter. I

would like merely to stress the main principles involved. We must put the matter frankly and openly affirm, despite all the old untruths, that education cannot but be linked up with politics.

We are living in an historic period of struggle against the world bourgeoisie, which is far stronger than we are. At this stage of the struggle, we have to safeguard the development of the revolution and combat the bourgeoisie in the military sense and still more by means of our ideology through education, so that the habits, usages and convictions acquired by the working class in the course of many decades of struggle for political liberty-the sum total of these habits, usages and ideas should serve as an instrument for the education of all working people. It is for the proletariat to decide how the latter are to be educated. We must inculcate in the working people the realisation that it is impossible and inexcusable to stand aside in the proletariat's struggle, which is now spreading more and more to all capitalist countries in the world, and to stand aside in international politics. An alliance of all the world's powerful capitalist countries against Soviet Russia-such is the real basis of international politics today. And it must, after all, be realised that on this will depend the fate of hundreds of millions of working people in the capitalist countries. We know that, at the present moment, there is not a corner of the earth which is not under the control of a small group of capitalist countries. Thus the situation is shaping in such a way that one is faced with the alternative of standing aloof from the present struggle and thereby proving one's utter lack of political consciousness, just like those benighted people who have held aloof from the revolution and, the war and do not see the bourgeoisie's gross deception of the masses, the deliberate way in which the bourgeoisie is keeping the masses in ignorance; or else of joining the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is with absolute frankness that we speak of this struggle of the proletariat; each man must choose between joining our side or the other side. Any attempt to avoid taking sides in this issue must end in fiasco.

Observation of the many remnants of the Kerensky gang, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Social-Democrats, as represented by the Yudeniches, Kolchaks, Petlyuras, Makhnos and others, has shown us such a variety of forms and shades of counter-revolution in various parts of Russia that we have every reason to consider ourselves far more steeled in the struggle than anybody else is. A glance at Western Europe shows the same thing happening there as in our country-a repetition of our own history. Almost everywhere elements similar to the Kerensky gang are to be met alongside the bourgeoisie. They predominate in a number of countries, especially Germany. One can see the same thing everywhere-the impossibility of taking an intermediate position, and a clear realisation that there must be either a whiteguard dictatorship (for which -the bourgeoisie of all the countries of Western Europe are preparing by arming against us), or the

dictatorship of the proletariat. We have experienced this so acutely and profoundly that there is no need for me to talk at length about the Russian Communists. Hence there can be only a single conclusion, one that should be the corner-stone of all arguments and theories about the Chief Committee for Political Education: the primacy of the Communist Party's policy must be frankly recognised in the work of that body. We know of no other form of guidance; and no other has been evolved in any country. Parties may represent the interests of their class in one degree or another; they may undergo changes or modifications, but we do not yet know of any better form. The entire course of the struggle waged by Soviet Russia, which for three years has withstood the onslaught of world imperialism, is bound up with the fact that the Party has consciously set out to help the proletariat perform its function of educator, organiser and leader, without which the collapse of capitalism is impossible. The working masses, the masses of peasants and workers, must oust the old intellectualist habits and re-educate themselves for the work of building communism. Otherwise the work of construction cannot be undertaken. Our entire experience shows that this is a very serious matter, and we must therefore give prominence to Party primacy and never lose sight of it when discussing our activities and our organisational development. How this is to be done will still have to be discussed at length; it will have to be discussed in the Party's Central Committee and in the Council of People's Commissars. The decree which was endorsed yesterday laid down the fundamentals in respect of the Chief Committee for Political Education, but it has not yet gone through all the stages in the Council of People's Commissars. The decree will be published within the next few days, and you will see that its final form makes no direct mention of relations with the Party.

We must, however, know and remember that, in law and in practice, the Constitution of the Soviet Republic is based on the tenet that the Party rectifies, prescribes and builds according to a single principle-to enable the communist elements linked with the proletariat to imbue the proletariat with their own spirit, win its adherence, and open its eyes to the bourgeois deceit which we have been trying so long to eliminate. The People's Commissariat of Education has gone through a long struggle; for a long time the teachers' organisation resisted the socialist revolution. Bourgeois prejudices have struck very deep root among the teachers. There has been a long struggle in the form of direct sabotage and of tenacious bourgeois prejudices, and we have to fight for the communist positions slowly, step by step and win them. The Chief Committee for Political Education, which is concerned with extra-mural education, the work of educating and enlightening the masses, is faced with the clear task of combining Party leadership with the effort to gain the adherence of, to imbue with its spirit and to animate with its initiative, this half-million strong army of teachers, this vast institution which is now in the service of the workers. Education workers-the teachers-were trained in the spirit of bourgeois prejudices and habits, in a spirit hostile to the



proletariat, with which they have had no ties whatever. We must now train a new army of teachers and instructors who must be in close touch with the Party and its ideas, be imbued with its spirit, and attract the masses of workers, instilling the spirit of communism into them and arousing their interest in what is being done by the Communists.

Since the old customs, habits and ideas must be discarded, the Chief Committee for Political Education and its personnel are faced with a most important task, which they must keep uppermost in their minds. Here we indeed have a dilemma: how can we establish a link between the teachers, most of whom are of the old school, with Party members, with the Communists? That is an extremely difficult problem, one that will require a considerable amount of thought.

Let us consider the means of establishing organisational links between people who are so different. In principle, we cannot for a moment doubt the need of the Communist Party's primacy. Consequently, the purpose of political culture, of political instruction, is to train genuine Communists capable of stamping out falsehood and prejudices and helping the working masses to vanquish the old system and build up a state without capitalists, without exploiters, and without landowners. How can that be done? Only by acquiring the sum total of knowledge that the teachers have inherited from the bourgeoisie. Without this the technical achievements of communism will be impossible, and all hopes for those achievements would be pipe dreams. So the question arises: how are we to organise these people, who are not used to bringing politics into their work, especially the politics that is to our advantage, i.e., politics essential to communism? That, as I have said, is a very difficult problem. We have discussed the matter in the Central Committee, and in discussing it have tried to take into account the lessons of experience. We think that a congress like the one I am addressing today, a conference like yours, will be of great value in this respect. Every Party Committee now has to look from a new angle upon every propagandist, who used to be regarded merely as a man belonging to a definite circle, a definite organisation. Each of them belongs to a ruling party which directs the whole state, and the Soviet Russia's world struggle against the bourgeois system. He is a representative of a fighting class and of a party which runs, and must run, an enormous machine of state. Many a Communist who has been through the splendid school of underground work and has been tested and steeled in the struggle is unwilling or unable to understand the full significance of this change, of this transition, which turns the agitator and propagandist into a leader of agitators, a leader in a huge political organisation. The kind of title he is given, even if it is an embarrassing one-such as superintendent of general schools-does not matter much; what is important is that he should be capable of directing the mass of teachers.

It should be said that the hundreds of thousands of teachers constitute a body that must get the work moving, stimulate thought, and combat the prejudices that to this day still persist among the masses. The heritage of capitalist culture, the fact that the mass of the teachers are imbued with its defects, which prevent them from being Communists, should not deter us from admitting these teachers into the ranks of the political education workers, for these teachers possess the knowledge without which we cannot achieve our aim.

We must put hundreds of thousands of useful people to work in the service of communist education. That is a task that was accomplished at the front, in our Red Army, into which tens of thousands of representatives of the old army were incorporated. In the lengthy process of re-education, they became welded with the Red Army, as they ultimately proved by their victories. This is an example that we must follow in our cultural and educational work. True, this work is not so spectacular, but it is even more important. We need every agitator and propagandist; he will be doing his job if he works in a strictly Party spirit but at the same time does not limit himself to Party work, and remembers that it is his duty to direct hundreds of thousands of teachers, whet their interest, overcome their old bourgeois prejudices, enlist them in the work we are doing, and make them realise the immensity of our work. It is only by tackling that job that we can lead this mass of people, whom capitalism suppressed and drew away from us, along the right path.

Such are the aims that every agitator and propagandist working in the sphere of extra-mural education must pursue and constantly keep in sight. A host of practical difficulties will be encountered in the process, and you must help the cause of communism by becoming representatives and leaders, not only of Party study-circles, but of the entire state administration, which is now in the hands of the working class.

We must overcome resistance from the capitalists in all its forms, not only in the military and the political spheres, but also ideological resistance, which is the most deep-seated and the strongest. It is the duty of our educational workers to accomplish the re-education of the masses. The interest, the thirst for education and knowledge of communism which are to be seen among them are a guarantee of our victory in this field too, although, perhaps, not as rapid as at the front and only after great difficulties and at times even reverses. However, we shall ultimately win.

Last, I should like to dwell on one more point. Perhaps the title of Chief Committee for Political Education is not properly understood. Inasmuch as it makes mention of the political concept, politics is the main thing here.

But how is politics to be understood? If politics is understood in the old sense, one may fall into a grave and profound error. Politics means a struggle between classes; means the relations of the proletariat in its struggle for its emancipation, against the world bourgeoisie. However, in our struggle two aspects of the matter stand out: on the one hand, there is the task of destroying the heritage of the bourgeois system, of foiling the repeated attempts of the whole bourgeoisie to crush the Soviet state. This task has absorbed most of our attention hitherto and has prevented us from proceeding to the other task, that of construction. According to the bourgeois world outlook, politics was divorced, as it were, from economics. The bourgeoisie said: peasants, you must work for your livelihood; workers, you must work to secure your means of subsistence on the market; as for economic policy, that is the business of your masters. That, however, is not so; politics should be the business of the people, the business of the proletariat. Here we must emphasise the fact that nine-tenths of our time and our work is devoted to the struggle against the bourgeoisie. The victories over Wrangel, of which we read yesterday, and of which you will read today and probably tomorrow, show that one stage of the struggle is coming to an end and that we have secured peace with a number of Western countries; every victory on the war front leaves our hands freer for the internal struggle, for the politics of state organisation. Every step that brings us closer to victory over the whiteguards gradually shifts the focus of the struggle to economic policy. Propaganda of the old type describes and illustrates what communism is. This kind of propaganda is now useless, for we have to show in practice how socialism is to be built. All our propaganda must be based on the political experience of economic development. That is our principal task; whoever interprets it in the old sense will show himself to be a retrograde, one who is incapable of conducting propaganda work among the masses of the peasants and workers. Our main policy must now be to develop the state economically, so as to gather in more poods of grain and mine more poods of coal, to decide how best to utilise these poods of grain and coal and preclude starvation—that is our policy. All our agitation and propaganda must be focussed on this aim. There must be less fine talk, for you cannot satisfy the working people with fine words. As soon as the war enables us to shift the focus from the struggle against the bourgeoisie, from the struggle against Wrangel and the whiteguards, we shall turn to economic policy. And then agitation and propaganda will play a role of tremendous and ever growing importance.

Every agitator must be a state leader, a leader of all the peasants and workers in the work of economic development. He must tell them what one should know, what pamphlets and books one should read to become a Communist.

That is the way to improve our economic life and make it more secure, more social; that is the way to increase production, improve the food situation and distribution

of the goods produced, increase coal output, and restore industry without capitalism and without the capitalist spirit.

What does communism consist in? All propaganda for communism must be conducted in a way that will amount to practical guidance of the state's development. Communism must be made comprehensible to the masses of the workers so that they will regard it as their own cause. That task is being poorly accomplished, and thousands of mistakes are being made. We make no secret of the fact. However, the workers and the peasants must themselves build up and improve our apparatus, with our assistance, feeble and inadequate as it is. To us, that is no longer a programme, a theory, or a task to be accomplished; it has become a matter of actual and practical development. Although we suffered some cruel reverses in our war, we have at least learnt from these reverses and won complete victory. Now, too, we must learn a lesson from every defeat and must remember that the workers and peasants have to be instructed by taking the work already performed as an example. We must point out what is bad, so as to avoid it in future.

By taking constructive work as an example, by repeating it time and again, we shall succeed in turning inefficient communist managers into genuine builders, and, in the first place, into builders of our economic life. We shall achieve our targets and overcome all the obstacles which we have inherited from the old system and cannot be eliminated at a single stroke. We must re-educate the masses; they can be re-educated only by agitation and propaganda. The masses must be brought, in the first place, into the work of building the entire economic life. That must be the principal and basic object in the work of each agitator and propagandist, and when he realises this, the success of his work will be assured. (*Loud applause.*)

## Endnotes

[1] The Conference met in Moscow from November 2 to 8, 1920, with 283 delegates attending. The main question discussed was the establishment of the Chief Committee for Political Education. A. V. Lunacharsky delivered the opening address, in which he dealt with the work done in the sphere of political education. The Conference also heard a report by N. K. Krupskaya on the current plan of work of the Chief Committee for Political Education, and Y. A. Litkens's report on the organisation of local political education departments. Other items on the agenda concerned the food campaign and political education, production propaganda in the light of the rehabilitation of economic activity, and the elimination of illiteracy. Lenin spoke after Krupskaya at the third session of the Conference, on the second day of the proceedings.

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